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ABSTRACT

This document defines the standards and characteristics of an assessment center. An assessment center consists of a standardized evaluation of behavior based on multiple inputs. Multiple trained observers and techniques are used. Judgments about behavior are made, in part, from specially developed assessment simulations. These judgments are pooled by the assessors at an evaluation meeting during which all relevant assessment data are reported and discussed, and the assessors agree on the evaluation of the dimensions and any overall evaluation that is made. A "typical" assessment center is discussed, followed by an analysis of the three major elements of an assessment center: (1) skills dimension; (2) assessment exercises and activities; and (3) assessors. Finally, a brief overview of research studies on assessment centers is offered. (16 references) (SI)

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AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE
ASSESSMENT CENTER METHOD

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Assessment Centers: Definition and Description

Since the 1950s, widespread use of assessment center technology has occurred in the United States and other countries. In the United States alone some 30,000 persons per year are assessed by business, industry, government and education. Tielsch and Whisenand (1977), contending that little change has occurred in the past century in the selection and promotion of law officers, described assessment center technology as offering "great hope for the future of public, as well as private, personnel administration" (p. 2). Other authors have also described assessment center processes as being among the major developments in the field of personnel psychology during the twentieth century (Thornton and Byham, 1982).

What distinguishes assessment center processes from other processes used for personnel selection and evaluation? In what ways does the use of assessment center processes offer a "great hope" in personnel practices?

Assessment Center Defined

In May, 1975, the Third International Congress on the Assessment Center Method endorsed the "Standards for Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations" presented by its Task Force on Development of Assessment Center Standards. Moses and Byham (1977), both members of that particular task force, included the definition in their book, Applying the Assessment Center Method:

To be considered as an assessment center, the following minimal requirements must be met:

--Multiple assessment techniques must be used. At least one of these techniques must be a simulation.

A simulation is an exercise or technique designed to elicit behaviors related to dimensions of performance on the job by requiring the participant to respond behaviorally to situational stimuli. The stimuli present in a simulation parallel or resemble stimuli in the work situation. Examples of simulations include group exercises, in-basket exercises, and fact-finding exercises.

--Multiple assessors must be used. These assessors must receive training prior to participating in a center.

--Judgments resulting in an outcome (i.e., recommendation for promotion, specific training or development) must be based on pooling information from assessors and techniques.

--An overall evaluation of behavior must be made by the assessors at a separate time from observation of behavior.

--Simulation exercises are used. These exercises are developed to tap a variety of predetermined behaviors and have been pre-tested prior to use to insure that the techniques provide reliable, objective, and relevant behavioral information for the organization in question.

--The dimensions, attributes, characteristics, or qualities evaluated by the assessment center are determined by an analysis of relevant job behaviors.

--The techniques used in the assessment center are designed to provide information which is used in evaluating the dimensions, attributes, or qualities previously determined.

In summary, an assessment center consists of a standardized evaluation of behavior based on multiple inputs. Multiple trained observers and techniques are used. Judgments about behavior are made, in part, from specially developed assessment simulations.

These judgments are pooled by the assessors at an evaluation meeting during which all relevant assessment data are reported

and discussed, and the assessors agree on the evaluation of the dimensions and any overall evaluation that is made.

The following kinds of activities do not constitute an assessment center:

--panel interviews or a series of sequential interviews as the sole technique.
--reliance on a specific technique (regardless of whether a simulation or not) as the sole basis for evaluation.
--using only a test battery composed of a number of pencil-and-paper measures, regardless of whether the judgments are made by a statistical or judgmental pooling of scores.
--single assessor assessment (often referred to as individual assessment)--measurement by one individual using a variety of techniques such as pencil-and-paper tests, interviews, personality measures, or simulations.
--the use of several simulations with more than one assessor where there is no pooling of data--i.e., each assessor prepares a report on performance in an exercise, and the individual reports (unintegrated) are used as the final product of the center.
--a physical location labeled as an "assessment center" which does not conform to the requirements noted above. (pp. 304-305)

Several reasons exist for the popularity of assessment center processes. One is the difficulty present in defining a manager's job. Not only do managers' jobs differ at different levels (e.g., entry level management with senior executive), but also within a level, not to mention differences present between organizations. One first-level manager may have a great responsibility for close supervision of personnel; another may be required to handle a heavy volume of paper work; a third may have equal responsibility for people and paper. Other factors serve to complicate completion of job analyses: changes either within or external to an organization may have an impact upon the nature of a manager's job, one-time tasks may be critical to a manager's success but may be difficult to define because of the singular nature of the task,

or the effect of the work of others may alter a manager's job, e.g., a change in the manager's supervisor. A second reason for the popularity of assessment centers is the opportunity for assessment of job-related behaviors rather than typical measures of on-the-job observations or from administration of pencil-and-paper tests. One problem with on-the-job observations is that most supervisors have little objective data for use in predicting an individual's performance in higher position levels. The use of paper-and-pencil tests has been criticized as an assessment method; although such tests may be reliable and valid, they often fail to meet the tests for fairness and non-discrimination established by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and other government agencies.

A Description of an Assessment Center

A description of a "typical" assessment center may clarify what an assessment center is and how one operates. An assessment center is a standarized set of procedures and activities which are multiple in number and which include one or more simulation exercises and which are used to assess persons' behaviors for selection, placement, development, or promotion, usually in managerial positions. An assessment center is not a location; an organization may conduct its assessment activities in many locations and not always in the same building or set of rooms.

When an assessment center is held, a limited number of participants (or assessees) is assessed. In most assessment centers, the number of assessees varies from one to twelve; the

ratio of assessees to assessors is usually 2:1, or lower. Although the high staff ratio adds to the costliness of assessment centers, a high staff ratio is necessary to meet the ethical requirement of multiple assessors. There are a number of benefits to the use of multiple assessors, including the general perception of both participants and assessors that the ratings made are "fairer." Of course, persons who work as assessors must be trained in the specific "look fors" if valid observations and interpretations of behaviors are to be made.

Participants attend one or more days of activities; this time is spent in completion of both individual and group tasks such as fact-finding exercises, in-basket exercises, leaderless group exercises, interviews, management games, inventories, and paper-and-pencil tests of knowledge or personality. Many of the activities may be simulations which are designed to measure specific behaviors.

An assessor prepares a written report on a participant's performance for each activity included in a particular assessment center. Thus, if an assessment center includes six activities, there will be six written reports for each participant. These reports contain observations on specific behaviors and produce diagnostic information about a participant's performance on several behavior dimensions. From a discussion of these reports, the assessors, working as a team, identify the strengths, the areas in need of improvement, and suggestions for improvement for each person assessed. This information is included in a final

written report which is made available to the participant, along with oral feedback.

Obviously the performance of assessors is a key to the success of an assessment center. Most assessors are given several days of training and, in some cases, are certified as assessors for a particular method only after having demonstrated skill in performance as an assessor. Assessors need not have been participants; in many organizations, the persons who are assessed are, however, a good source for identifying persons to be trained as assessors.

During the operation of the assessment center, the assessors conduct the assessment exercises and observe the participants' behaviors. Careful recording of observed data is important; after observation of an exercise, the assessor prepares a written report for the person observed. As already noted, these reports form the basis of the "jurying" by assessors and for the preparation of a final report. In a typical assessment center, each assessor will have prepared a report for each assessee or will have had informal contact with each person being assessed while activities are being conducted.

Major Elements of an Assessment Center

There are three elements essential to the conduct of an assessment center. First, the skill dimensions of the type of position to be observed and assessed must be identified. Second, the activities to be used as assessment exercises must be designed and developed. Third, the persons who are to serve as assessors

for the conduct of assessment centers need to be identified and trained. Each of these major elements must be planned for with care and with concern for the use of the best possible processes.

Skill Dimensions

One of the key tasks is the identification of the skill dimensions to be observed in an assessment center. The prevailing opinion of authorities on assessment centers is that no single set of managerial skills applies equally to all types of managerial positions. Four conclusions were reached, based on the research related to the question of what skills should be assessed:

1 Managers' jobs differ greatly from one another, both in substance and mode of operation.

2. There is little agreement between the job duties reported by incumbent supervisors and their duties as seen by their superiors.

3. Upper level management positions can be distinguished from middle and lower levels in terms of the amount of decision making and severity of personal demands of the job.

4. The relation between job duties and individual behavior is an important consideration, especially in analyzing higher level management jobs. Different management styles can and do lead to identical results. (Moses and Byham, 1977, pp. 56-57)

Skill dimensions must not only be job related but they must be for the "target job." The "chairman of the board" syndrome, i.e., that individuals selected must be able to perform not only the job for which they are selected but all upper level jobs as well, is inappropriate unless internal promotion is the only method used to

fill upper level jobs and a significant number of persons selected at lower levels do progress to upper levels.

Based on their review of job analysis efforts in managerial assessment centers, Thornton and Byham (1982) reached several conclusions:

1. Managerial jobs can be defined in terms of a set of behavioral dimensions. These behavioral dimensions can be operationally defined as clusters of behaviors observable on the job and in performance tests that simulate important aspects of the job.

2. Managerial jobs can be distinguished from each other in terms of unique sets of dimensions. Jobs at different levels of management and often at the same level are characterized by different sets of dimensions. The same dimension label (e.g., Analysis) may be manifested in qualitatively different ways for jobs at different hierarchical levels.

3. Managerial jobs must be defined in terms of a relatively large set of dimensions. An exact number cannot be specified, but we do not believe it is adequate to use only two major categories that have been variously labeled task centered (initiating structure, production-oriented). Ten to fifteen dimensions are required to adequately define managerial jobs for the purposes of assessment programs. For developmental purposes, a longer list of dimensions provides a more thorough diagnosis of reasons for effective and ineffective performance. (p. 138)

Despite the repeated caution about the need for behavior dimensions to be job-related, common behavior dimensions have been identified by a number of authors. Bender (1973) listed twenty-six commonly used dimensions and Thornton and Byham (1982) listed thirty-three managerial dimensions. For illustrative purposes, Thornton and Byham's list is presented:

Oral Communication: Effective expression in individual or group situations (includes gestures and nonverbal communications)

Oral Presentation: Effective expression when presenting ideas or tasks to an individual or to a group when given time for preparation (includes gestures and nonverbal communication)

Written Communication: Clear expression of ideas in writing and use of good grammatical form

Planning and Organizing: Establishing a course of action for self and/or others to achieve a specific goal; planning proper assignments of personnel and appropriate allocation of resources

Delegation: Utilizing subordinates effectively; allocating decision making and other responsibilities to the appropriate subordinates

Control: Establishing procedures to monitor and/or regulate processes, tasks, or activities of subordinates and job activities and responsibilities; taking action to monitor the results of delegated assignments or projects

Development of Subordinates: Developing the skills and competencies of subordinates through training and development activities related to current and future jobs

Organizational Sensitivity: Action that indicates an awareness of the impact and implications of decisions on other components of the organization

Extraorganizational Sensitivity: Action that indicates an awareness of the impact and implications of decisions relevant to societal and governmental factors

Extraorganizational Awareness: Use of knowledge or changing societal and governmental pressures outside the organization to identify potential problems and opportunities

Organizational Awareness: Use of knowledge of changing situations and pressures inside the organization to identify potential organizational problems and opportunities

Sensitivity: Actions that indicate a consideration for the feelings and needs of others

Leadership: Utilization of apppropriate interpersonal styles and methods in guiding individuals (subordinates, peers, superiors) or groups toward task accomplishment

Recognition of Employee Safety Needs: Awareness of conditions that affect employees' safety needs and taking action to resolve inadequacies and discrepancies

Analysis: Identifying problems, securing relevant information, relating data from different sources, and identifying possible causes of problems

Judgment: Developing alternative courses of action and making decisions based on logical assumptions that reflect factual information

Creativity: Generating and/or recognizing imaginative solutions and innovations in work-related situations

Risk Taking: Taking or initiating action that involves a deliberate gamble in order to achieve a recognized benefit or advantage

Decisiveness: Readiness to make decisions, render judgments, take action, or commit oneself

Technical and Professional Knowledge: Level of understanding of relevant technical and professional information

Energy: Maintaining a high activity level

Range of Interests: Breadth and diversity of general business related knowledge--well informed

Initiative: Active attempts to influence events to achieve goals; self-starting rather than passive acceptance. Taking action to achieve goals beyond those called for; originating action

Tolerance for Stress: Stability of performance under pressure and/or opposition

Adaptability: Maintaining effectiveness in varying environments, with various tasks, responsibilities, or people

Independence: Taking action in which the dominant influence is one's own convictions rather than the influence of others' opinions

Tenacity: Staying with a position or plan of action until the desired objective is achieved or is no longer reasonably attainable

Job Motivation: The extent to which activities and responsibilities available in the job overlap with activities and responsibilities that result in personal satisfaction

Career Ambition: The expressed desire to advance to higher job levels with active efforts toward self-development for advancement

Integrity: Maintaining social, ethical, and organizational norms in job-related activities

Work Standards: Setting high goals or standards of performance for self, subordinates, others, and organization. Dissatisfied with average performance

Resilience: Handling disappointment and/or rejection while maintaining effectiveness

Practical Learning: Assimilating and applying new, job-related information taking into consideration rate and complexity (pp. 138-140)

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), in the development of the NASSP Assessment Center Project, included twelve behavior dimensions; most of these dimensions are similar to, and inclusive of, the concepts listed by Thornton and Byham in the list just presented. The NASSP Assessment Center behavior dimensions are the following:

Problem Analysis. Ability to seek out relevant data and analyze complex information to determine the important elements of a problem situation; searching for information with a purpose.

Judgment. Skill in identifying educational needs and setting priorities; ability to reach logical conclusions and make high quality decisions based on available information; ability to critically evaluate written communications.

Organizational Ability. Ability to plan, schedule, and control the work of others; skill in using resources in an optimal fashion; ability to deal with a volume of paper work and heavy demands on one's time.

Decisiveness. Ability to recognize when a decision is required (disregarding the quality of the decision) and to act quickly.

Leadership. Ability to get others involved in solving problems; ability to recognize when a group requires direction, to effectively interact with a group to guide them to accomplish a task.

Sensitivity. Ability to perceive the needs, concerns, and personal problems of others; skill in resolving conflicts; tact in dealing with persons from different backgrounds; ability to deal effectively with people concerning emotional issues; knowing what information to communicate and to whom.

Stress Tolerance. Ability to perform under pressure and during opposition; ability to think on one's feet.

Oral Communication. Ability to make a clear oral presentation of facts or ideas.

Written Communication. Ability to express ideas clearly in writing; to write appropriately for different audiences--students, teachers, parents, etc.

Range of Interest. Competence to discuss a variety of subjects--educational, political, current events, economic, etc.; desire to actively participate in events.

Personal Motivation. Need to achieve in all activities attempted; evidence that work is important in personal satisfaction; ability to be self-policing.

Educational Values. Possession of a well-reasoned educational philosophy; receptiveness to new ideas and change.

These twelve behavior dimensions represent three broad clusters--administrative skills, interpersonal skills, and communication skills--as well as three dimensions (personal motivation, range of interests and educational values) which may be classified as "other." As Hersey (1982) stated:

> In summary, ratings made in the NASSP Assessment Center are adequate psychometrically. Job-relevant skills are being measured. These measurements are related to subsequent measure of job performance and school climate. As in previous government and private industry contexts, the assessment center is a valid predictor of the job success of administrative personnel in an educational setting. (p. 4)

Assessment exercises and activities

Once the skill dimensions to be included in an assessment center have been identified, the activities or exercises which are to be used as data sources for assessment must be designed. Even as there is no single set of managerial skill dimensions, there is no universal set of activities which all assessment centers use. There is, however, a common belief that "samples" of actual behavior are preferred over "signs" of behavior; a simulation exercise will extract a sample of a person's behavior while the completion of a general intelligence test is more or less a "sign" that a person may behave in an intelligent manner. Both "samples" and "signs" offer specific advantages, and assessment centers may benefit from including both kinds of data-gathering activities. Activities or exercises which might be included in an assessment center are the following:

1. In-baskets. In an in-basket exercise, a participant is asked to respond to a number of written memoranda, letters and notes within a specified period of time. The participant assumes a specific role and is given the

opportunity to display skill in several behavior dimensions related to on-the-job performance.

2. Leaderless group discussions. Participants are given background information for study and are then asked to perform a specific task or reach consensus on a decision. Participants may be assigned a specific role in a competitive leaderless group exercise or may, instead, have no particular role to fill. These exercises are usually designed to measure leadership behaviors and other behavior dimensions.

3. Interview simulation. In this type of exercise, a participant may be asked to conduct a one-on-one interview with an irate customer or client, an insubordinate employee, a candidate for a job, an employee with a problem, or similar interpersonal situations.

4. Schedule making. Because managers frequently schedule the work of others, this type of exercise provides participants with an opportunity to demonstrate this type of supervisory and managerial skill.

5. Case studies. The use of case studies permits participants to analyze data about a specific situation, prepare alternate strategies to resolve the issue presented in the case study, and select one or more rational solutions. There are several variations on how participants may be asked to present their findings, ranging from written reports to superordinates to giving an individual oral report to an assessor who interviews the participant about the report presented.

6. Management games. These games often use teams of participants in investing or managing a company's stock in trading or acquiring orders, other businesses, etc.

7. Background interviews. In an assessment center, a background interview serves as an information gathering technique. The assessor who conducts the interview may provide a written report which offers information about several dimensions of behavior. A structured interview format is usually used to establish consistency in the types of information gathered by assessors.

8. Paper-and-pencil tests. Tests and inventories on personality, intellectual ability, verbal and quantitative skills, aptitudes and interests, as well as

other aspects of personnel psychology may be used to provide information about participants.

9. Fact-finding exercises. This type of exercise requires the participant, working alone, to read a brief description of a problem, seek additional information from an assessor who serves as a resource person, and then arrive at a decision and solution for the problem. A report must be prepared and given. The report is given to the assessor who served as the resource person or, on occasion, to a second assessor who serves as an observer in this type of exercise. Usually the differing phases of this exercise are timed and the participant is expected to complete activities for each phase of the exercise within the allotted time. Analysis and stress behaviors are two common behavior dimensions assessed by this type of exercise.

10. Staff meetings. In the staff meeting exercise, the participant assumes the role of a unit head and meets with several staff of the unit (with these roles being played by trained personnel) to obtain information prior to a meeting with the chief executive of the agency or firm.

11. Negotiation. This type of exercise generally requires a participant to bargain with another person (an assessor or a person trained for the role) who portrays a superordinate, subordinate, peer, or someone external to the work unit of the participant.

Not all types of activities are included in all assessment centers; usually, multiple exercises are used and are coded to major skill dimensions being assessed with each skill dimension being assessed in more than a single type of activity.

Assessors

Careful and appropriate training of assessors is an integral part of the operation of an assessment center; such training will not only produce highly skilled assessors who can record observed behaviors and write objective reports but often will have the serendipitous effect of improving the on-the-job skills of trained assessors. Although the assessors may benefit by personal and

professional development, the major purpose of the training program for assessors is to prepare individuals who can provide valid and reliable observations of participant behaviors pertinent to the targeted skill dimensions included in a particular assessment center. The training program should seek to develop various skills for the assessors:

1. An understanding of the meaning of each skill dimension and an understanding of the "look fors" in the exercises used in the assessment center.

2. Observational skills related both to the skill dimensions and to each activity or exercise included in the assessment center.

3. Skill in classifying or categorizing behaviors observed.

4. Skill in rating behaviors, i.e., differentiating between varying levels of skill shown by participants.

5. Skill in assuming roles necessary for the operation of the assessment center, e.g., as a resource person in a fact-finding exercise or as a subordinate in a "staff meeting" exercise.

6. Skill in writing reports which carefully record and document the behaviors demonstrated by participants.

7. Skill in evaluating and integrating data related to a skill dimension, when the data are from multiple activities or exercises and when overall ratings of skill levels must be made during the "jurying" of participant performance.

8. Skill in providing recommendations for inclusion in reports to participants, including recommendations about selection, promotion, or development.

The preparation of training manuals, standardized report forms, and other uniform processes increases the reliability of observations and written reports. Systematic procedures for observing, coding by dimension, recording observations, and interpreting data should be provided in the assessor training

sessions and then used to monitor subsequent performance of trained assessors.

Assessors are frequently selected from within the organization, from both line and staff positions. If assessors are used from external sources, the skill of such assessors must be high for their judgments to be accepted by the assessors and assessees of the organization. The use of outside consultants is a common practice; highly skilled assessors may add a quality of heightened objectivity to the operation of a center, provided they are perceived to be credible within the organization.

Some companies have developed and expanded their assessment capabilities by training top-level executives as assessors and then selecting additional persons for assessor training from among the employees who perform well when assessed in the early uses of the assessment center process within the organization. Frequently, assessors are drawn from personnel who are one managerial level above the target job level. A key consideration in the selection of assessor personnel, of course, is the need for the assessor to understand the target role or job. Another key consideration is the need for understanding and backing of the assessment center process by the top-level executives of the agency in which an assessment center is implemented.

How often should assessors serve in the role of assessor? Assessors should be able to perform as assessors as soon as possible after training. Assessors then need to work in the assessor role often enough that skills are "fresh" and the

assessor can be effective (perhaps two to three times each year, at a minimum). Care should be taken, however, to train enough assessors to meet the planned schedule for conducting assessment centers without imposing upon individuals who serve as assessors or permitting any individual assessors to become the "owners" of the assessment center.

Research Studies

Despite the extensive use of assessment centers in the public and private sectors, critics have raised questions about the validity, reliability, appropriateness of method, and other concerns (Ross, 1979). In the first legal challenge to assessment center methods, several applicants for Deputy Chief of Police in Omaha, Nebraska, contested the selection of the top three candidates, primarily on the basis of the reliability of assessors' ratings (r=.84). The judge upheld the selection because the process met or surpassed minimal ethical standards for conduct of assessments centers. The Griggs vs. Duke Power Company case broadened the significance and application of reasonable cause in selection of employees and endorsed the position of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) that test scores must be related to success on the job (Willis and Becker, 1976). Although setting up an assessment center which meets ethical standards and complies with requirements of the EEOC and other civil rights agencies is not easy, the benefits available from valid and reliable documentation are, for many, worth the efforts.

In 1964, Albrecht, Glaser, and Marks reported research

validity studies which they found to be "cautiously supportive" (p.352). Correlations from one multiple-assessment validity study ranged from -.05 to .46. They also reported slight, but not strong, validity for the interview; questionable results for the projective instruments; weak relationships between objective psychometric devices and the criterion; but best results for predictor ratings based on the psychometric data. Many other studies have been conducted since then, but none has matched the longevity of AT&T's Management Progress Study. Indeed, one of the major criticisms is that, too often, studies are not longitudinal. Other critics contend that results from an assessment center must be but one part of selection data, while others doubt the long-term stability of performance data from an assessment center.

Nevertheless, a large body of research exists which contains data on assessment center methods. For example, Kraut (1972) reported the results on 437 salesmen. Those who were rated higher in the assessment center received initial promotion earlier. They also were more likely to be given a second promotion ($p < .01$), while some of those with lower ratings were demoted ($p < .07$). Kraut noted from his research that ". . . assessment programs have validity in predicting those who will move ahead in an organization. Many of the studies have flaws, but there is a consistent pattern of apparent validity" (p.318).

Dozens of studies have been conducted on assessment center validity and reliability under varying circumstances from small firms to multi-national corporations, from studies with and

without control groups, from those with experimental designs, from concurrent designs, and from correlational studies with and without feedback to participants. Studies have been conducted on centers operated by American Airlines, AT&T, Caterpiller Tractor Company, Detroit Edison, General Electric, IBM, Internal Revenue Service, Michigan Bell, the New York Metro Transit Authority, the Public Service Commission of Canada, Sears, Standard Oil of Ohio, Tennessee Valley Authority, Union Carbide Corporation, and the Wickes Corporation, among others. In appraising the assessment center method, Hinrichs and Haanpera (1976) reported that in, terms of the reliability of an overall measure, the method was adequate, if not outstanding. Further, they found at least minimal reliability for the overall assessment rating, the judgments about overall performance within specific exercises, and overall evaluations for individuals. Hinrichs and Haanpera (1976) wrote:

> Other studies show that these overall evaluations have validity by correlating significantly with important criteria on a concurrent basis, and, more important, also on a predictive basis . . . . There are also indications that these kinds of overall evaluations are fair, i.e., they do not discriminate unfairly against minority and female participants (p.33).

Thornton and Byham (1982) summarized their review of studies on the criterion validity of the overall assessment center judgment by noting that there were mixed results, but that

assessment center data were more accurate predictors than paper-and-pencil tests or ability and personality test scores. Likewise, they found that information from assessors on exercises and dimension rating was more valid than single test scores and that validity of the overall assessment rating was more stable over time. Thornton and Byham concluded with an admonition to use a selection system that uses multiple sources of information.

The scope and depth of research on assessment centers is voluminous--far beyond the scope of this paper. Serious reviewrs will examine for themselves the literature on validity and reliability studies. Although they will find extensive documentation in support of assessment centers, they will also find flaws and gaps in the research. One unanswered question, for example, is: Are the results from an assessment center worth the cost? But, regardless of the imperfections in assessment centers, their methods cannot be dismissed out of hand. The evidence is too great in quantity, too consistent in quality, too tempting in interest, and too promising in outcome.

Summary

As interest in assessment centers has increased, there has been an increased need for controls upon assessment center operations to maintain the integrity of the process. Thornton and Byham (1982), for example, gave one description of a self-styled "assessment center" which does not conform to the Standards and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations as adopted by the International Congresses on the Assessment Center Method:

> . . .The selection program included two panel interviews by representatives of employees and managers, in an interview and testing by an outside consultant, and an interview by the director of the division under study. Two main ingredients were lacking: (a) the assessment procedures included no job simulation activities; and (b) the various interviewers did not meet to systematically discuss and integrate the information gathered. Rather, the director told the panelists from the beginning that he was not asking them to participate but to give advice and to provide him with information. After the interviews, the panelists' evaluations were given to the director who made his own decision. The report contains no data but concludes with this assertion that "this point was definitely proven. A government manager can successfully run his own assessment center.
>
> Two points of concern are raised. First, the program did not conform with the generally accepted practices of assessment centers. Second, no research data were reported to substantiate that participants, employees, or managers were satisfied with the procedure or that the interviewers' rating had reliability or validity. No data substantiated that the program had any predictive validity or relationship to job performance. (p. 14)

A rose by any other name may smell the same, but an assessment center is not an assessment center simply because someone chooses to use the label to describe personnel practices. The standards and characteristics of an assessment center have been outlined; those who work in personnel management and personnel psychology should restrict their use of the term, "assessment center," to examples which meet the Standards established.

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